

Remember?...

Folk songs by the old Limelitters

By JAMIE CRAIG

No sense gossiping about The Limelitters, the outrageous things they say, the length of their hair, dreams, despairs, etc. They are, after all, only The Limelitters, 10 years gone, guys who in their time produced very ordinary music very well indeed. There's a Meetin' Here Tonight. Madeira M'Dear. Ah, now you remember.

The Limelitters. Very rousing, early civil rights movement sensibility, the folk wave. They invoked a very infectious rhythm from Glenn Yarbrough's guitar, Alex Hassilev's banjo and Lou Gottlieb's big string bass. Never used a drummer but still got a big rhythm. The Limelitters were pre-electric in every sense of the word.

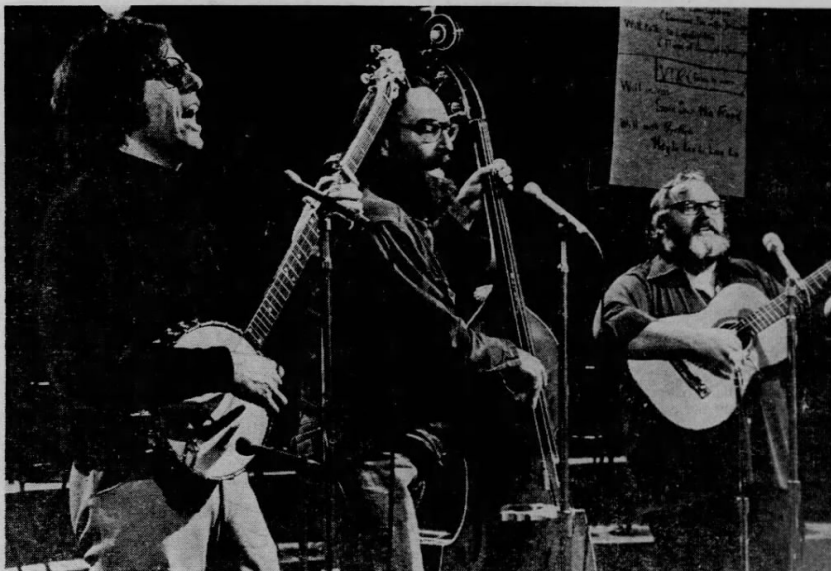
Their audience was primarily university students and the group split up when students started demanding a little more content from entertainment. The obtuse, blurry call to some vague form of human liberation of which the folk artists wanly sang gave way to more directly political lyrics and scorching rhythms designed to shatter the predominant predilection to what the record clubs still categorize as "listening and dancing" music, and all that it stood for. The Limelitters were finished. We thought.

Yarbrough hung on . . . and on, and on, and did pretty well, grossing no less than \$350,000 in his best year. His appeal was evidently still marketable, though he wasn't about to emit any of those teen hits.

Then, to much public ballyhooing, Yarbrough too announced his retirement from "the meaningless entertainment business," the sale of his considerable assets



LOU GOTTLIEB ARGUES
... it's only for money



ALEX HASSILEV, LOU GOTTLIEB, GLENN YARBROUGH
... smooth as ever after 10-year absence

PHOTOS BY BRIAN KENT

and a protracted cruise to the South Seas, on a boat he was having built in Richmond, B.C.

Yarbrough is now back in the music business. So are Lou Gottlieb and Alex Hassilev. Together. The Limelitters Reunion, they call themselves. The three of them were in Vancouver the other day and they sound just the same. Precisely. And everybody, including you probably, will love them. A curious thing.

They came in cold to CBC's television studios on West Georgia, picked up instruments supplied for them by the network, spent perhaps 90 seconds tuning them; Yarbrough set a beat with his foot and then, pure and simple, flawless, just as if someone had put a record on, out came There's a Meetin' Here Tonight. It was surrealistic. Bizarre. In fact Hassilev uses these very words to describe the reunion. (To be televised Monday, April 9 at 7:30 p.m.)

The technical types down at the CBC studios, the producers and the soundmen and cameramen and script girls etc. etc. never clap during rehearsals. They've been through too many of them, they're too blasé. But they clapped for The Limelitters. Not that the music was that good, (it isn't had either, to be sure). More, perhaps, because this was the reincarnation of a less psychologically blighted era, the (relatively) innocent early '60s. And also in recognition of the fact that these guys are still around, that as a group their energies haven't dissipated altogether and forever, that after all these years they still know each other, and know the same songs, and are willing to do them together. For one reason or another, you have to love them. Whether or not they love themselves is another question.

Lou Gottlieb is too . . . well, sophisticated, to enjoy the music he makes. He enjoys making it, up to a point, but not the music itself, especially since this reunion will largely reproduce its old hits. Gottlieb has a PhD in musicology from the University of California and is a bona fide madman besides. After The Limelitters broke up (July, '63) he bought 32 acres of land in California and founded the Morning Star Ranch. He then leased the land to God.

Since God cannot (and never would) collect rent, Gottlieb (and God) allowed anyone whomsoever access to the land. Gottlieb now calls the failed experiment (too many people took advantage of the offer, the neighbors raised hell) a scientific breakthrough, scientific because it will work every time if properly conducted.

Gottlieb got out of The Limelitters because making all that money made him suspicious, competitive, pessimistic and ultimately physically ill, he says. He's been living off his savings ever since, a series of fiscal adventures, too many of them unwise (economically, anyway), which recently left him broke.

The best Gottlieb has to look forward to in The Limelitters Reunion is spending a few months making music with his 18-year-old son, who is part of the rock band that will accompany the group. Gottlieb maintains that the people he really digs now are those under five years of age. His own generation, he says, is too prosaic and too predictable. Hassilev says that Gottlieb's value musically is more theoretical than practical.

Alex Hassilev, reported to speak so many languages you wouldn't believe it if I told you, got sidetracked

from a classical music career when he discovered a talent for writing pop songs and was seduced by the prospects.

When the Limelitters disbanded, Hassilev opened his own recording studio in Los Angeles and got into what he describes as avant garde producing. To make money he also produced albums for Dennis Weaver, Theodore Bikel and Yarbrough, which you wouldn't exactly want to call avant garde.

Like Gottlieb, Hassilev's intelligence is vivacious and extremely energetic. The way he picks up his banjo — like putting a leash on a trusted and dying dog — makes you wonder how he's going to sustain interest in any but the money (and nostalgic) aspects of the tour.

Yarbrough? Well, Yarbrough's sensibility (though not his image) is altogether different from his bachelor comrades. Yarbrough is quiet, self-effacing, so modest he's indifferent to most questions ("talk to the other guys, they're a lot more interesting than me"), a family man (a wife, one kid). I talked to Yarbrough almost two years ago, at which time he said the music business was rotten and cheap, that he was absolutely disgusted with the whole mess and that "sure I'll keep singing, but from now on it'll be on a dock in the South Seas or someplace." He also said he was never much interested in music anyway.

Then, his boat dry docked but almost finished, he fell off it and broke his leg. The leg mended, sort of, and he set sail for Los Angeles last fall, something nobody, but nobody, attempts to do at that time of year. Calamity was so near so often that it got to be passe. He made it, however, but his leg didn't. Complications. He's still limping. Trip to South Seas necessarily postponed. Money runs out. (While in Vancouver building boat — 46-foot ketch — had lived in \$28-a-week motel, so had evidently learned frugality, but not soon enough.)

Glenn Yarbrough has only one marketable skill. Making music. So that's what he's doing.

"But I'll leave next fall for sure," he says. "I'm only doing this for the money. For the others it'll be nice, though, they've been out of the business for 10 years. I still think it's meaningless. But then what business isn't. Anyway, there's no way I'm sticking around after next fall."

Hassilev: "Oh, I think Glenn'll be back. He'll go off on his trip for maybe four or maybe six months, then he'll be back. If audiences want you, you go back, that's all there is to it."

The Limelitters Reunion. Their music is tighter than ever, though they've only been rehearsing for a month. One supposes it's like tennis or riding a bike — as long as you don't try anything tricky, the basic skill stays with you.

Lou Gottlieb isn't going to hassle about Yarbrough's leadership anymore. And, come to think of it, they do have one new song of note, set to one of their four or five basic tunes. "We've been published, promoted and hustled, 'cause we were afraid to be broke," goes one of the lines. It's sort of a summing up of The Limelitters career. They call it Frequently Sold.